

Indiana Forest Action Plan National Priorities Section

Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Division of Forestry

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Introduction

The Secretary of the US Department of Agriculture, through the 2008 Farm Bill, called for a re-examination and assessment of the nation's forests, identification of priority areas for federal assistance, and a description of resources necessary to address statewide and regional strategies. The 2008 Farm Bill, under Title VIII – Forestry, (reauthorized in the 2014 Farm Bill) amended the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, to include the requirement that each state develop a long-term, statewide assessment and strategies for forest resources. These assessments and strategies focused on three national priorities:

- Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses
- Protect Forests from Threats
- Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

In 2010, the Indiana Division of Forestry developed the first geospatially-based Statewide Forest Assessment of all private, public, urban and rural forest resources in the Indiana. This was followed by stakeholder-driven Statewide Forest Strategy (now called the Indiana Forest Action Plan) that met the Farm Bill requirements and priorities.

These documents were developed with a comprehensive team of stakeholders to address cross-boundary, landscape scale actions that would be the most efficient activities to address issues of concern recognized in the assessment phase of the Forest Action Plan process.

The 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills require states to periodically review or update their plans. In 2017, the Indiana Division of Forestry is beginning the process of updating its Forest Action Plan with assessment and plans to work with partners and stakeholders to finalize an updated statewide strategy between 2019 and 2020.

Forest Action Plans (FAPs) represent a strategic plan for the nation's forests that can direct limited resources where they are needed most. Through FAPs, state foresters can demonstrate how federal investments can be used to leverage other resources and produce measurable outcomes that address national priorities.

This National Priorities Section for the Indiana FAP is designed around the three national priorities in the Farm Bill and attempts to show how Indiana's FAP aligns with those priorities and highlights successful programs, projects or actions that have contributed to each national priority category. This National Priorities Section is not intended as a complete or comprehensive list of accomplishments with the scope of Indiana's FAP but as a sample of the leverage and value federal funds can provide to help in accomplishing our collective work.

National Priority 1: Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses

This national priority aligns with Indiana FAP's Strategy 1: Conserve, manage and protect existing forests, especially large forest patches. A focus in the FAP is the targeting of

conservation resources and action steps to “Target Forest Patches” as determined by the FAP’s assessment and strategy process. It includes, for example Action Step 1.1, strategic forestland conservation with the mission of conserving, managing and protecting forests in each Target Forest Patch and Action Step 1.4 to “increase the number of woodland parcels that are under management as quantified by a management plan, cost-share practices, enrollment in Indiana Classified Forest & Wildlands or other type of assistance.”

Since the 2010 Indiana FAP, Indiana has been successful in achieving strategic increases. Quantifiable results include an increase of 100,000 acres enrolled in the Indiana Classified Forest & Wildlands Program with corresponding increase in acres that have professional timber management plans. As of today, there are over 750,000 acres enrolled in this program with new enrollments concentrating in targeted areas.

This has enabled measurable accomplishment on FAP Action Step 1.3 to “increase economic incentives including cost-share and conservation payments”. The Indiana Division of Forestry has partnered cooperatively with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to serve as a technical service provider, write plans and check installed forestry practices under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). According to information provided by NRCS, obligations for forestry practices, which include Brush Management, Forest Stand Improvement, Forest Trails and Landings, Herbaceous Weed Control, Riparian Forest Buffer, and Tree and Shrub Establishment among others have been obligated at a rate of almost \$1 million per year over the last 4 years and in 2015 all EQIP applications for assistance were obligated without backlog.

These targeted increases would not have been as successful without federal funding assistance provided through Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Landscape Scale Restoration Request for Proposals. Two successful grant projects highlighted below helped to achieve the successes mentioned.

Parcel Level Strategies

The Statewide Strategies at a Parcel Level project developed a statewide, private landowner contact database that was linked to geo-spatial data and included the ability for landowners to connect online for forestry information and update their mailing addresses with email and phone numbers.

Large Block Outreach & Enrollment

Classified Forest & Wildlands (CFW) Program expansion continues to be a goal in statewide conservation initiatives, including the 2010 Indiana Forest Action Plan. Legislated requirements, changes in state tax policy, and limited resources to hire additional Cooperative Forest Management (CFM) staff create challenges in targeting outreach and new enrollments to large tracts in priority areas.

The project provides funding for outreach and for foresters to enroll targeted forestland according to a prioritized parcel list developed from (Parcel Level Strategies project) a geospatial forest landowner contact information database. The largest privately owned parcels of existing forestland within Forest Action Plan target areas will be contacted and receive information about the CFW Program, federal programs, and other conservation options.

Also relating to this national priority and FAP strategy 1, specifically Action Step 1.9, “to acquire land from willing sellers and protect Indiana's rich natural heritage”, the Bicentennial Nature Trust (BNT) is working to increase public forests. The State of Indiana has obligated \$20 million in state funding to support the BNT and the Lilly Endowment contributed an additional \$10 million grant with these funds being matched 1:1 by conservation partners. To date, there are nearly 200 projects that have been funded with forests receiving 25% of funding.

National Priority 2: Protect Forests from Threats

This national priority relates to maintaining forest sustainability and aligns with FAP Strategy 5 and multiple action steps. As one method of attempting to assure forest sustainability in the state (and also relating to Action Step 4.7) the Indiana State Forest system and Indiana Classified Forest & Wildlands Program (Umbrella) maintains independent, third-party certification by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® and the Forest Stewardship Council®. Audits to these rigorous certification standards are conducted annually.

The FAP assessment process specifically identifies fragmentation/parcelization and forest exotic-invasive plants and the most important threats to forests in the state and while the FAP addresses fragmentation and parcelization more broadly it offers numerous specific strategies and action steps that focus on invasive species including the development of a statewide early detection, rapid response (EDRR) program for forest invasive plants (and corresponding Action Steps 1.17 – 1.20). There are two specific projects relating to invasive species highlighted below.

Invasive Species BMP Pilot Project

This is a two-year project that implements the recommendation of Indiana Invasive Species Council to assess and refine the Invasive Plant Advisory Committee's Invasive Species Best Management Practices. It also provides demonstration and public outreach to encourage private landowner adoption.

The project directly addresses a main strategy of the 2010 Indiana FAP. It was coordinated across 148,000 acres and engaged 22 professional foresters in invasive species monitoring, mapping, planning, treatment, inspection, education, documentation and other activities.

Public marketing of finalized products will reach an additional 58 professional and 35 public foresters, 99 Soil & Water Conservation Districts and Resource Conservation & Development councils, approximately 14,000 Classified Forest & Wildlands owners, and 50 member organizations of the Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee that represent thousands of individuals interested in the management of Indiana's forests.

Next Steps in Early Detection, Rapid Response

This project specifically addresses Forest Action Plan, Strategy 3 component to “develop statewide Early Detection Rapid Response Program for forest invasive plants” and other action steps. It creates a robust bulwark against establishment of new invasive plants in Indiana's Target Forest Areas using a “Strike Team” to coordinate education and awareness, and to conduct control efforts for EDRR species.

The project builds on an established and successful U.S. Forest Service Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry funded project in southern Illinois. DNR Forestry coordinates the project with Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (SICIM), the oldest and largest CWMA in Indiana. DNR Forestry and SICIM have an established track record of working with a broad base of partners to facilitate EDRR.

Invasive plants are a significant problem throughout Indiana. A conservative estimate by the Indiana Invasive Species Council (IISC) showed that property owners and taxpayers spent \$5.85 million in 2012 controlling invasive plants. Over the same time period state agencies are estimated to have spent about \$3 million controlling plant species. Control of invasive plants ranked among the top three forest issues in the 2010 Indiana Statewide Forest Assessment. Left unchecked, invasive plants are a direct threat to forest regeneration and sustainability.

The project leverages partner involvement, including Indiana DNR, IISC, Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN) and others. It expands invasive plant EDRR efforts from a small group of well-informed partners to a coordinated regional network that acts, responds and interacts at local and regional levels to address one of the greatest threats to Indiana’s working forest landscapes.

In addition to the projects above addressing this national priority an additional project is underway to train loggers and forest industry professionals to an expanded suite of forest best management practices that includes invasive species, threatened and endangered species and other specialized situations. These targeted trainings are making accomplishing measurable results on this national priority and also FAP Strategy 3, Action Step 3.1.

National Priority 3: Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

Indiana FAP has many strategies and action steps that address this national priority. FAP strategy 2, to “restore and connect forests, especially in riparian areas” is meant, in part to protect and enhance water quality and quantity (objective 3.1). FAP strategy 5, to “maintain and expand markets for Indiana hardwoods, especially those that are sustainably certified” relates to maintaining and enhancing the economic benefits and values of trees and forests (objective 3.4).

Other aspects of this national priority align with the Indiana FAP, such as protect, conserve, and enhance wildlife and fish habitat (objective 3.5) and connecting people to trees and forests, and engage them in environmental stewardship activities (objective 3.6). Indiana FAP Strategy 4, “coordinate education, training, and technical assistance, especially to develop strategic partnerships” broadly relates to this national priority and focuses on working with partners to

promote forestry knowledge and understanding, including the coordinated delivery of forest-related programing. There are two projects/success stories that highlight contribution to this national priority listed below.

Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment

In 2014, DNR Forestry provided direct support to 15 research projects investigating the ecological effects of forest management on State Forests. Most of the support went to researchers involved with the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment (www.heeforeststudy.org/), a long-term project based at Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood state forests. DNR Forestry provided support to nine graduate/post-graduate researchers in 2014 working on questions related to forest management and ecological impacts. Since 2006, DNR Forestry has provided support to 24 graduate and post-graduate researchers.

DNR Forestry-supported researchers published eight articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals and completed three master's theses in 2014. This long-term research is related to national priority 3, Indiana FAP strategy to promote forestry knowledge and understanding and Action Steps 4.6 and 5.5.

Sustainable Forestry Television Series and YouTube video series

This project will explore in depth 13 topics on sustainable forest management in half-hour segments and is developing 35 "how-to" instructional videos that build on DNR Forestry capacities to deliver training and information to private landowners in a reliable, on-demand format.

It follows the success of "Indiana Expeditions: Forests At Work," an hour-long TV feature first broadcast in April, 2012 (also streaming online) and builds on a partnership with Metropolitan Indianapolis Public Broadcasting, Inc. (WFYI).

Advances in mobile devices, changing consumer behavior, and efficiencies in audio-visual productions have bumped demand for accessible, relevant and concise video to provide information on woodland stewardship to private landowners who are increasingly connected to digital media and less connected with managing their forests. Both efforts increase landowner-forest connections and get folks outdoors exploring and trying new things.

The projects listed in this document highlight successful actions contributing to each national priority. It is important to note that without the help of federal and non-federal partners these and other significant achievements in advancing the Indiana FAP and national priorities would not be possible.